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**The Fragility of Finnish Parliamentary Democracy at the Moment
when Prussianism Fell**

Abstract

The Finnish case is in many ways illustrative of the complexities of democratisation after World War I. Finland found itself at a nexus of a Swedish constitutional tradition, legalism and ideological controversies adopted from Imperial Germany, the radicalised Russian Revolution and Western parliamentary democracy. After having been a model for reformers demanding women's suffrage, for instance, the country found itself in autumn 1918 going in the opposite direction to almost all other European countries. This article analyses the fragility of Finnish parliamentary democracy then, contrasting it with longer-term trends supportive of democratisation. 'Democracy' had been the goal for most Finnish political parties since the adoption of universal suffrage in 1906, but the meaning of the concept remained contested and became increasingly so after the Russian Revolution in disputes concerning parliamentary sovereignty, the declaration of independence, a civil war, monarchical reaction and the search for a republican compromise. For as long as Germany was expected to win the war, democracy in Finland remained fragile, challenged from within first by the revolutionary far left and then by the reactionary right. The victory of 'Western democracies' forced both left and right to rethink their

opposition to 'Western' parliamentary democracy and to adapt to a constitutional compromise. The ideological contestability of democracy remained but confrontations were confined by extremism's loss of credibility, the growing influence of centrist groups and a shared determination to avoid another civil war.

Turning points in Nordic history have been closely connected to international trends and transnational ideological debates even though national historiographies rarely reflect these entanglements. An obvious case is the situation at the end of the First World War, often viewed as heralding the birth of modern democracy. According to Tim B. Müller and Adam Tooze, democratisation in the years around 1918 was global, simultaneous and rapid, entailing the beginning of mass politics, after 19th-century suffrage reforms had already increased expectations for a democratic breakthrough.¹ In this period, national debates on reform, revolution, democracy and parliamentarism also became

¹ T.B. Müller / A. Tooze, 'Demokratie nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg', in: eidem (eds.), *Normalität und Fragilität. Demokratie nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, Hamburg 2015, 9–10, 23.

transnationally interconnected to an exceptional degree.² New states with democratic constitutions were formed and political rights extended in many old ones. At the same time, the 'Red Scare' arising from the Russian Revolution inspired conservatives to adopt reactionary policies against both socialists and progressivists. As a consequence, democratisation could sometimes stand for little more than self-determination and attempts to restore authoritarian systems.³

Müller and Tooze have asked how democracy could be constructed in such contingent circumstances to withstand new crises: how could stability replace fragility?⁴ The Finnish case is illustrative of how democracy is constructed in unstable circumstances: a model country of universal suffrage experienced a civil war and seemed

² R. Bessel, 'Revolution', in: J. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. 2, Cambridge 2014, 126–144; J. Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora. Geschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Munich 2014; P. Ihalainen, *The Springs of Democracy. National and Transnational Debates on Constitutional Reform in the British, German, Swedish and Finnish Parliaments, 1917–1919*, Helsinki 2017, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21435/sfh.24>.

³ D.M. Green, 'Liberal Moments and Democracy's Durability: Comparing Global Outbreaks of Democracy – 1918, 1945, 1989', in: *Studies in Comparative International Development* 34 (1999) 1, 83–120, especially 88–91.

⁴ Müller / Tooze, 'Demokratie', 12–13, 23.

in autumn 1918 to be going in the opposite direction to almost all other countries in Europe but finally turned attempts to avoid a renewed crisis into a resource that sustained its democracy. As Johanna Rainio-Niemi has pointed out, Finnish democracy after the First World War deserves attention as Western and Eastern elements clashed in the polity. Despite instability in comparison with the other Nordic countries, the Finnish constitution of 1919 was one of the few among the new democracies to survive the interwar period, the Second World War, and the Cold War.⁵

1. The unexpected fragility of Finnish democracy in 1917-

18

By the First World War – fought according to war propaganda for or against ‘Western democracy’ –, neither Sweden nor Finland was yet a democratic stronghold. Norway and Denmark had moved towards parliamentary democracy more distinctly before the war.⁶ Although

⁵ J. Rainio-Niemi, ‘Die finnische Demokratie in der Zwischenkriegszeit’, in: Müller / Tooze (eds.), *Normalität und Fragilität*, 392–393.

⁶ U. Jakobsen / J. Kurunmäki, ‘The Formation of Parliamentarism in the Nordic Countries from the Napoleonic Wars to the First World War’, in: P. Ihalainen / C. Ilie / K. Palonen (eds.), *Parliament and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of a European Concept*, New York 2016, 98–100.

Finnish universal suffrage was still a point of reference for reformists in several countries in 1917, the newly independent polity by no means constituted 'the least fragile country' in the world; it would be called so only a century later, in 2016/17.⁷ Finland had gained independence from Russia but attempts to form a parliamentary democracy had failed. The country had witnessed a cycle of confrontational constitutional disputes that ended with civil war in spring 1918 – more than 30,000 citizens were killed, many of them in prisoner camps. German troops had intervened, and their presence influenced a constitutional struggle dominated by monarchists searching for a German prince for foreign political, economic and also ideological reasons. Finland had become an uncritically grateful protectorate of Imperial Germany, suffering from famine and disease, and facing unresolved foreign-policy issues with Britain and Soviet Russia over Eastern Karelia and with Sweden concerning the Åland Islands. Another attempt at a Bolshevik revolution was not out of the question either.⁸ The fragility of the Finnish polity was obvious to observers in 1918.

⁷ Fragile States Index 2016, 27 June 2016,

<http://library.fundforpeace.org/fsi16-report>.

⁸ V. Vares, *Kuninkaan tekijät. Suomalainen monarkia 1917–1919*.

Myytti ja todellisuus, Porvoo 1998; V. Vares, *Varpuset ja pääskyset. Nuorsuomalaisuus ja Nuorsuomalainen puolue 1870-luvulta vuoteen 1918*, Helsinki 2000; M. Hentilä / S. Hentilä, *Saksalainen Suomi 1918*, Helsinki 2016, 13–14, 54.

According to the *Manchester Guardian*, 'the most democratic country in the world, as the Finns were accustomed to boast, has become a stronghold of frantic reaction.'⁹ In Denmark, news of the treatment of Red prisoners led to demands that 'a democratic country' should no longer support such 'tyranny' and 'terror' by selling foodstuffs to Finland.¹⁰

In the historiography of the Finnish Civil War, there has been a tendency to play down the 'Eastern' elements of this struggle over democracy in 1917/18.¹¹ The argument is dominant that Finnish Social Democracy was consistently aiming to achieve Western

⁹ 'The Fate of Finland: A Stronghold of Reaction', in: *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 July 1918, 5.

¹⁰ *Uusi Suometar (US)*, 9 August 1918, 4.

¹¹ See, however, H. Soikkanen, *Kohti kansan valtaa. Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue 75 vuotta*, 1, 1899–1935, Vaasa 1975, 214, 232; E. Dubrovskaja, 'The Russian Military in Finland and the Russian Revolution', in: S. Badcock / L. G. Novikova / A. B. Retish (eds.), *Russia's Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914–22. Book 1: Russia's Revolution in Regional Perspective*, Bloomington 2016, 247–266; E. Ketola, 'Sosiaalidemokraattien ohjelma Suomen itsenäisyyden toteuttamiseksi keväällä ja kesällä 1917', in: S. Suodenjoki / R. Turunen (eds.), *Työväki kumouksessa*, Helsinki 2017, 244, 246.

parliamentary democracy in non-revolutionary ways¹² but that social inequalities and extraparliamentary radicalisation led to a civil war¹³ during and after which socialists were treated with unjustified violence.¹⁴ Sociological and structural explanations of the war can be as simple as statements that it 'reflected fractures within society'.¹⁵ In cultural representations of the Civil War, however, a certain revolutionary nostalgia prevails. This perspective emphasises national reconciliation by arguing that no Finn was 'guilty' of the Civil War. But this

¹² A.F. Upton, *The Finnish Revolution, 1917–1918*, Minneapolis 1980; R. Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland*, Berkeley 1988, 150, 167–9, 191; R. Alapuro, 'Millainen oli Suomen vallankumous 1918?', in: S. Suodenjoki / R. Turunen (eds.), *Työväki kumouksessa*, Helsinki 2017, 260.

¹³ P. Haapala, *Kun yhteiskunta hajosi: Suomi 1914–1920*, Helsinki 1995, 14, 223, 242; P. Haapala, 'The Expected and Non-Expected Roots of Chaos: Preconditions of the Finnish Civil War', in: T. Tepora / A. Roselius (eds.), *The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, Memory, Legacy*, Leiden 2014.

¹⁴ J. Kekkonen, *Kun aseet puhuvat. Poliittinen väkivalta Espanjan ja Suomen sisällissodissa*, Helsinki 2016.

¹⁵ T. Tuomas / A. Roselius, 'Johdanto: Sisällissota ja historiantutkimus', in: T. Tepora / A. Roselius (eds.), *Rikki revitty maa. Suomen sisällissodan kokemukset ja perintö*, Helsinki 2018, 11, 17–18.

interpretation neglects the pre-civil war dynamics of political debate and the considerable redefinition of the concept of democracy in a revisionist direction that the leaders of the Social Democratic Party carried through in the aftermath of the civil war: instead of the power of the proletariat as the only form of democracy, the democratic and parliamentary process that might include cooperation with non-socialist democrats was emphasised. This interpretation also neglects transnational explanations of the attitudes of the Finnish right towards democracy: comparatively pro-democratic views during 1917 turned after the Civil War to deep scepticism about democracy and stubborn dedication to the model of the (already wavering) German constitutional monarchy and finally readiness to compromise under Western pressures and fears of another Bolshevik rising in 1919. The importance of the centre in search for a compromise between the extremes should also be kept in mind. The contribution of this essay is to deepen recent scholarly debate on politicised conceptions as factors in generating the conflict¹⁶ through an analysis of the reconceptualisations of democracy engaged in by different parties at a time when Finnish democracy was at its most

¹⁶ S. Suodenjoki / R. Turunen, 'Johdanto: Työväki, valta ja vapaus vuonna 1917', in: eidem (eds.), *Työväki kumouksessa*, Helsinki 2017, 10, 25; J. Siltala, 'Ratkaisuna sota, jota kukaan ei tahtonut', in: T. Tepora / A. Roselius (eds.), *Rikki revitty maa. Suomen sisällissodan kokemukset ja perintö*, Helsinki 2018, 80.

fragile. The analysis demonstrates how a redefined Social Democracy and centrist republicans were able to discover common ground, and how the victory of the Western democracies in the war and the German Revolution forced the right, too, to start to look for a compromise in parliamentary democracy.

2. Long-term structures supportive of representative government meet short-term fragility

In the early 20th century, Finland was a 'Western' polity within the Russian Empire: in terms of its political culture, it was a nexus of Swedish traditions of constitutionalism and representation inherited from the early-modern Swedish realm, German political theories, legalism and competing ideologies of the left and right, 'Western' or 'bourgeois' notions of democracy and parliamentarism, and Marxist revolutionary ideas. In the context of the Russian Revolution of 1905, the country was able to reform its representative institution from a four-estate diet to a unicameral parliament based on a broader suffrage than anywhere else in the world. In the first elections of 1907, 19 female MPs were elected to the Finnish Eduskunta and the Social Democrats won 80 out of 200 seats, which made it the largest socialist party in any parliament. Yet, Finland did not possess a parliamentary government, sovereignty remaining with the Grand Duke; nor did the country have a democratised communal suffrage. Finland's geopolitical position makes its development an interesting point

of comparison in relation to general European and Scandinavian trends of democratisation in the aftermath of World War I. Finnish debates on democracy were exceptionally confrontational in 1917. After the February Revolution, practically all Finnish parties welcomed 'rule by the people' (*kansanvalta*), even if they advocated different versions of it.¹⁷ The Social Democratic majority in the first parliament of 1917 aimed at parliamentary sovereignty through which democracy as rule by the proletariat would have been exercised by the parliamentary majority. As the Russian Provisional Government rejected the decision, dissolving the Finnish parliament and calling for new elections in which the Social Democrats lost their majority, the leaders of the party challenged the legitimacy of the second parliament of 1917, disregarding dissenting voices within their own party. The confrontation ended up with a civil war in which both the Reds and the Whites fought for what they considered 'rule by the people'.¹⁸ The Red government represented the people as a united wielder of power, prioritised 'democratic' revolutionary bodies of the workers and rejected any bourgeois government as an illegitimate

¹⁷ *Työmies*, 25 March 1917, 6; *US*, 27 March 1917, 6; *Maakansa*, 27 March 1917, 1.

¹⁸ Ihälainen, *Springs of Democracy*, Section 3.4.

representative of property-owners.¹⁹ Yet, the White government won the war. Disagreements regarding the desirability, implications and ways of achieving 'democracy' remained deep-rooted between and within the socialists and the non-socialists after the war, supported by the bitterness of the war experiences and the course of international politics, which continued to affect transnational debates on democracy.

The key questions in Finland were whether democracy in an independent nation state was to be built on monarchical constitutional traditions shared with Sweden, whether Germany provided or contradicted the model for democratisation, or whether models of liberal democracy should be adopted once the Western powers started to appear as the likely winners of the war. Only communists – in exile, or living clandestinely within Finland – could still conceive of adopting Russian models after the Bolshevik Revolution and Red rising. Ideologically motivated, contrasting understandings of democracy within Finland, as well as transnational connections to German, Swedish and Russian disputes regarding the nature of democracy,²⁰ continued to add to the

¹⁹ M. Hyvärinen, 'Valta', in: M. Hyvärinen et al. (eds.), *Käsitteet liikkeessä: Suomen poliittisen kulttuurin käsitehistoria*, Tampere 2003, 81–82.

²⁰ More extensively in P. Ihalainen, 'Transnational Constructors of Parliamentary Democracy in Swedish and Finnish Constitutional

fragility of democracy in Finland. This was particularly because Finnish independence had been recognised by Soviet Russia, Germany and Sweden but not by the leading 'Western democracies' Britain or the United States, and the post-Civil War order in Finland was questioned by France, too, after the election of Friedrich Karl, the brother-in-law of the Kaiser, to the Finnish throne on 9 October 1918. This process of contesting, negotiating and redefining democracy in Finland was not destined to become a success story. Only after the revolution in Germany and consequent rethinking among the Swedish right, which had been able to block democratisation next door until November 1918, with pressures from the Entente, was Finnish democracy able to stabilise.

In autumn 1918, Finland constituted another 'Prussian' rather than 'democratic' polity - at least in the indefinite sense of the terms as defined by war propaganda. In Wilsonian rhetoric, democracy mainly stood for the established political order of the Western powers themselves.²¹ From Western perspectives, the Finnish government seemed to be swimming against the tide of democracy expected after the war - even after Germany had proclaimed that it aimed at parliamentarisation and democratisation in early October and abolished monarchy in a revolution in November. For *The Times*,

'Controversies, 1917-19', in: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 44 (2019) 2, 213-235.

²¹ More on this in M. Llanque, *Demokratische Denken im Krieg: die deutsche Debatte im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Berlin 2000, 12-13, 107.

the Finns appeared as 'the last people in all Europe, including Germany, to abandon belief in the intellectual pre-eminence and material invincibility of the Germans'.²² This 'Prussianism', to adopt the wartime usage of the Western allies, manifested itself in the obstinate pursuit of a new monarchical constitutional order, and broader monarchical culture, in the aftermath of the civil war.

After this Civil War, the Finnish right – both the initially emancipatory Finnish Party and the Swedish People's Party that safeguarded the status of a linguistic minority as opposed to majority parliamentarism²³ – had doubts about the ability of the Finns as a people to establish a balanced democratic polity. The right aimed at a regulated autocracy (a constitutional monarchy of the German type) to limit parliamentarism and raised the issue of restrictions to universal suffrage.²⁴ In its harsh treatment of prisoners and expansionism towards Eastern Karelia, the Finnish government was likewise distancing itself from Western conceptions

²² 'Finland under the Germans', *The Times*, 11 October 1918, 7.

²³ T. Saarinen / P. Ihalainen, 'Multi-sited and Historically Layered Language Policy Construction: Discourse cycles on Constitutional Bilingualism in Parliamentary Debate on the Finnish 1919 Constitution', in: *Language Policy* 17 (2018), 545–565.

²⁴ Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, sections 5.4 and 6.4.

of justice.²⁵ The Swedish *Social-Demokraten* condemned such 'acts of revenge by the bourgeois classes against the crushed Reds' and considered the Finnish project to recruit a German king as destructive of democracy.²⁶ German reformists, too, were critical of the way in which 'a people that has developed in a manner that is typically democratic' was now building a Prussian-style monarchy. For the far left, German support for 'a regime of terror of a kind that has never been experienced in the world before' was completely reprehensible.²⁷ The conservative *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, in contrast, supported the Finnish regime,²⁸ and also the liberal *Vossische Zeitung* advocated a compromise on 'a democratic way of governing' under monarchy.²⁹ For reformists in neighbouring

²⁵ L. Jonkari, *Kansainliitto Suomen turvallisuuspolitiikassa ja kansainvälistissä suhteissa. Vastaanotto ja vaikutus julkisessa sanassa ja yhteiskunnassa vuosina 1919–1936*, Turku 2008, 34.

²⁶ Reported in *US*, 16 August 1918, 4; Hentilä / Hentilä, *Saksalainen Suomi*, 229.

²⁷ *US*, 26 August 1918, 2; H. Haase, *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Reichstags. Reichstagsprotokolle. Stenographische Berichte*, <http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/index.html>, 22 October 1918, 6189; Hentilä / Hentilä, *Saksalainen Suomi*, 223, 230–231 and 299, on German concerns about associations with the Finnish regime and Finnish attempts to influence German leftist opinion.

²⁸ *US*, 26 August 1918, 2.

²⁹ Reviewed by *US*, 30 August 1918, 4.

countries, the Finnish state had become a cautionary example of the fragility of democracy at a time when this system was believed to be making a breakthrough in Germany, too.

3. New confrontations on 'democracy' in the face of the fall of Prussianism

The ideologically contested meanings of democracy and the connected institutional fragility of the post-Civil War Finnish polity remained obvious between August and December 1918. It was becoming increasingly evident that Imperial Germany – the model polity for the Finnish right and also a major source of political inspiration for the bourgeois and socialist left – was not going to win the war. The right questioned the relevance of the political changes taking place in Germany, maintaining that the Germans were merely updating their constitution to reach Finnish democratic levels, and insisted that the international standing of Finland called for a German prince.³⁰ The leaders of the Finnish rightist government P. E. Svinhufvud and J. K. Paasikivi simply did not want to believe in a German defeat.³¹ They went on searching for a regulated 'royal democracy'³² to stem what they saw as the extreme democracy of Bolshevism (and reformism more

³⁰ Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 407.

³¹ Hentilä / Hentilä, *Saksalainen Suomi*, 324.

³² Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 329.

generally), and proceeded to the election of Friedrich Karl to the Finnish throne still *after* the parliamentarisation of Germany had been announced. They were forced to reconsider this policy by December as a consequence of the fall of the Kaiser, the victory of the Western democracies, the unwillingness of Britain and the United States to recognise Finnish independence under a German king, and the abdication of the uncrowned King of Finland. Yet, they readopted the idea of a presidential republic only after the elections of March 1919 had produced a three-quarter republican majority.

During constitutional disputes among the victors of the Civil War, the right had consistently defined their monarchical constitutional proposals as 'democratic'. Justifying any future political order as 'rule by the people' was important for Finnish-speaking conservatives due to their long-established goal of emancipating the Finnish-speaking majority from Swedish cultural dominance. Stronger defences of democracy in a more parliamentary form had originated from left-liberal Young Finns (later Progressivists) and the radically anti-socialist and anti-capitalist Agrarian League.³³ After Helsinki was liberated by German troops in spring 1918, however, Young Finns also tended to turn pro-German and anti-Entente. Finnish liberalism was no united advocate of 'Western' democracy.³⁴

³³ Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, Section 6.4.3.

³⁴ Vares, *Varpuset*, 238.

The ideological division of the European left – arising from pre-war disputes between orthodox Marxism and revisionism, disagreements on supporting the war effort and the Russian Revolution – led to the formal division of the Finnish left only after the Civil War. In autumn 1918, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was in a state of reconstruction after a failed revolution, redirecting itself towards German and Swedish forms of revisionism. After the failure of the rising that had followed the radicalisation of party supporters, the militant class-war discourse adopted in parliament and the press, the deconstruction of parliamentary legitimacy, and constitutional plans for a Red Finland,³⁵ party moderates aimed at parliamentary cooperation with reformist bourgeois parties in a political system that echoed Western parliamentary democracy.³⁶ Many of the party's former revolutionary leaders had fled to Russia, founding the Finnish Communist Party that denounced both democracy and parliamentarism

³⁵ More on this in J. Ehrnrooth, *Sanan vallassa, vihan voimalla. Sosialistiset vallankumousopit ja niiden vaikutus Suomen työväenliikkeessä 1905–1914*, Helsinki 1992; J. Siltala, *Sisällissodan psykohistoria*, Helsinki 2009, 524; and Ihlainen, *Springs of Democracy*, Section 3.4.

³⁶ On this change, N. Kannisto, *Vaaleanpunainen tasavalta? SDP, itsenäisyys ja kansallisen yhtenäisyyden kysymys vuosina 1918–1924*, Helsinki 2016.

in their 'Western' and 'bourgeois' forms and advocated the dictatorship of the proletariat instead.³⁷

These discursive confrontations between varieties of rightist critics and the centrist and moderate leftist spokesmen for the Western-type of parliamentary democracy were evident in Finnish party organs and related parliamentary debates in autumn 1918. The debates concerned competing understandings of 'democracy' (*demokratia*) or 'rule by the people' (*kansanvalta*) and notions of its internal and external enemies formulated by the conservatives of the Finnish Party (reformulated as the National Coalition Party in December 1918) in *Uusi Suometar*, the Young Finns (divided into the National Progress Party and monarchists who joined the National Coalition in December 1918) in *Helsingin Sanomat* and the Social Democrats in *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti*. Our focus is on how the parties experienced and conceptualised the fragility of Finnish democracy and the rapid turn from German to Western models for political order, imposed both externally and internally.

4. The monarchist right redescribes and challenges democracy

The Finnish-speaking right had in principle welcomed the extension of rule by the (Finnish-speaking) people in the immediate aftermath of Russia's February Revolution and supported a

³⁷ O. W. Kuusinen, *Suomen vallankumouksesta. Itsekritiikkiä*, Petrograd 1918, 40–41.

presidential republic when independence was declared in December 1917, but this attitude was subsumed by an anti-democratic reaction after the Civil War. Among rightists, the radicalisation of Social Democratic class struggle discourse during 1917 and wartime Red propaganda had reinforced associations between extreme democracy and revolutionary socialism. Furthermore, Bolshevik Russia appeared to constitute an immediate threat to the new polity. The conservative concept of rule by the people proved fragile during 1918: the party wanted to ensure strong executive power to counter what they saw as failed socialist democracy arising from universal suffrage.³⁸ As the Finnish Party nevertheless considered democracy to be part of Finnish political culture, its spokesmen emphasised the parliamentary dimension of the planned monarchy by defining it as 'democratic'. At the same time, they entertained ideas about limitations on freedom of speech, unicameralism, parliamentarism and universal and equal suffrage, which all challenged the foundations of representative democracy.³⁹

When Germany still appeared to be on the verge of victory in August, Oswald Kairamo published an article arguing that the inevitable development towards 'people's states' (*kansanvaltio*,

³⁸ On conservative disappointment with 'the class parties' of the reformed parliament, see V. Vares, *Vanhasuomalainen Lauri Ingman ja hänen poliittinen toimintansa*, Helsinki 1996, 144–146.

³⁹ Ibid., 147.

derived from the Germanic concept of *Volksstaat* which saw the people and the state as identical⁴⁰⁾ had been so universal that there was no way governing without popular consent expressed by a representative institution. This did not imply a republican constitution, however, and the Entente provided no imitable models as Britain had crushed the Boer republics, the French constitution was widely rejected, and the United States exercised imperialistic warfare endangering 'really democratic politics'. The Western powers no longer fought for 'democracy' as the Bolshevik Revolution had turned democracy markedly more Red to serve their imperialistic interests. The Finnish 'people's state', as depicted by Kairamo, should therefore adopt the Germanic constitutional monarchy that had proven victorious in the war.⁴¹ *Uusi Suometar* later maintained that the German liberal thinker Friedrich Naumann had also advocated 'a people's state' under monarchy and preferred the emphasis on nation as 'an existing, predetermined natural entity' greater than all of its individual members rather than the concept of a 'republic' (*tasavalta*, literally 'equality of power').⁴² This reasoning lent support to the notion of 'people's community' (*Volksgemeinschaft*), providing a seemingly apolitical

⁴⁰ C. Gusy, 'Fragen an das „demokratisches Denken“ in der Weimarer Republik', in: C. Gusy (ed.), *Demokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik*, Baden-Baden 2000, 648–649, 652, 658.

⁴¹ *US*, 2 August 1918, 3; *US*, 7 August 1918, 8.

⁴² *US*, 24 September 1918, 7.

alternative to the Western concept of democracy. In a Finnish people's state, there would be no 'unlimited' or 'absolute rule by the people' as in Red Finland.⁴³ The Finnish conservatives were therefore making use of the fragility of democracy exposed by both the impact of Bolshevism on Finnish socialist discourse and the suggested imperialism of the Western powers. They wished to curtail democracy with a Prussian-style monarchy defined by the concept of a people's state adopted from German academic debates. German comments supportive of the monarchical project were reported in detail in *Uusi Suometar*. The paper also contributed to the discursive deconstruction of democracy by echoing German claims about it as a mere Western hoax: the war would be brought to an end by sacking the ''democratic' and violent rulers' of Britain, France and the United States⁴⁴ before they could destroy liberty in their own countries. Rightist rejections of democratisation and parliamentarisation in Germany were likewise reprinted by *Uusi Suometar* without the expression of reservations.⁴⁵ The pro-German discourse may have been motivated by a search for an ally against Bolshevik Russia and was supported by centuries of German cultural influence, yet, the idealisation of the German polity was also ideological, revealing the limits of Fennoman democracy.

⁴³ *US*, 9 October 1918, 6.

⁴⁴ *US*, 10 September 1918, 7.

⁴⁵ *US*, 29 September 1918, 12; *US*, 6 October 1918, 9.

As the royal election approached, conservative MPs defined the state of affairs in Finland as democracy and asserted that monarchy was reconcilable with it. Democracy in the sense of universal suffrage might be conceded as necessary for a modern polity but some nevertheless wished to limit popular influence through parliament. J. K. Paasikivi, the conservative prime minister, claimed that republicanism stood for 'social democracy' and that non-socialist republicans also aimed at democracy of the Bolshevik kind. He doubted the desire of the Finns to establish such a democracy and insisted that 'democracy, rule by the people' was fully reconcilable with constitutional monarchy. Paasikivi's rhetorical redescriptions were supported by Paavo Virkkunen and Ernst Nevanlinna who viewed 'a democratic kingship' as ideal for Finland and assured that the constitutional proposal would lead to 'in every respect one of the most democratic forms of government in the world' which would be 'more democratic than in any monarchical country in Europe and more democratic than in many republics.'⁴⁶

As the monarchists failed to achieve the required majority, *Uusi Suometar* attacked the Agrarians and republican Young Finns as false democrats who had made it impossible to end the interregnum with a constitution based on 'democratic principles' and extensive parliamentary powers. What they would now get was the obsolete 18th-century Swedish constitution which offered the people very

⁴⁶ *US*, 8 August 1918, 6; *US*, 9 October 1918, 5-6.

limited influence and a royal election.⁴⁷ The conservative claim was that the 'democratic' Finnish political system was fragile because it was being undermined by republican demands and that establishing a strong monarchy in the national historical tradition was the solution to this.⁴⁸ The 18th-century Swedish constitution was claimed to have 'guaranteed democracy against foreign powers' through the period of Russian domination when 'rule by the people' had remained dormant. 'Real democracy' now needed to be built on this old constitution rather than on 'democracy in the composition of our parliament.'⁴⁹ Finnish democracy continued to be weakened by an exclusive and uncompromising constitutional discourse. *Uusi Suometar* claimed that '[t]he Agrarian League, as 'a blatant class party', wants equally little democracy as the Socialists whenever 'the people' are someone else than the Agrarians themselves.'⁵⁰ Accusations made against the Social Democrats in 1917 were now applied to non-

⁴⁷ *US*, 9 August 1918, 8; *US*, 11 August 1918, 5.

⁴⁸ P. Ihalainen, 'The 18th-Century Traditions of Representation in a New Age of Revolution: History Politics in the Swedish and Finnish Parliaments, 1917–1919', in: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 40 (2015) 1, 70–96.

⁴⁹ Kaarlo Krohn, *US*, 18 August 1918, 4.

⁵⁰ *US*, 13 August 1918, 3; *US*, 8 October 1918, 4. See Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 203, 205, 514, 518, 521, for the Social Democratic monopolisation of democracy during 1917.

socialist republicans: their democratic nature was denied or presented as one-sidedly linked to party interests. The Agrarians who claimed to be 'advocating the cause of rule by the people and vindicating the interest of democracy' were accused of preventing 'democratic progress' under a monarchical constitution.⁵¹ Ernst Nevanlinna, the chairman of the Finnish Party, implied that the Agrarians were enthused by 'the huge waves of democracy in the world' expected to reach Finland after the war. In fact, Nevanlinna argued such waves might hit Prussia but not Finland which had 'already taken democracy to a final, I would like to say, unlimited victory' through its declaration of independence. This usage of democracy reveals a conservative identification of rule by the people with national self-determination, facilitated by the semantic amalgamation of the people as a political agent and the nation as an ethnic entity in the Finnish language. Such semantic confusion allowed the conservatives to represent national independence, the already reformed parliament and the reduction in the powers of the Swedish-speaking bureaucracy as aspects of unlimited rule by the people⁵² and to claim that democracy stood for the existing political system reinforced with a Prussian-style monarchy.

Parliamentarisation in Germany came at the worst possible moment for Finnish monarchists - during the last attempt to force through

⁵¹ US, 29 September 1918, 6; US, 10 October 1918, 4.

⁵² US, 9 October 1918, 6.

a monarchical constitution by cutting some monarchical powers, when preparations for a royal election were nearly complete. The conservatives conceded that including the Social Democrats in the German government 'gives it a decisively democratic character, while the event is entirely new and most significant in German political history', but proceeded all the same with the royal election.⁵³ Abuses of arguments derived from history, interference with parliamentary rules, and attacks on rival parties, were taken to the extreme to persuade the republicans,⁵⁴ which decreased the perceived legitimacy of the election procedure further. *Uusi Suometar* also called for an international campaign against the global anarchy advocated by Bolshevism, calling it 'the struggle of real democracy against the terror of the most incapable elements of society'.⁵⁵ The Finnish socialists were urged by their right-wing opponents to abandon their internal state of war, since the bourgeois parties were ready to observe democracy as demonstrated by the new laws on local government.⁵⁶ Conservative views on these laws would change as soon as the election results turned against them.

⁵³ *US*, 4 October 1918, 7.

⁵⁴ *US*, 10 October 1918, 4; *US*, 12 October 1918, 4

⁵⁵ *US*, 15 October 1918, 4.

⁵⁶ *US*, 30 October 1918, 4; *US*, 31 October 1918, 3; *US*, 8 November 1918, 5.

Unlike Sweden, where the German Revolution made the right give in to pressures for reform during November 1918, the Finnish conservatives remained at first unwilling to rethink, maintaining that the Prussians and Swedes were merely catching up Finland by giving universal suffrage to both sexes and enabling a 'people's parliament built on an entirely democratic basis.' With legislation on local government passed in 1917 the Finns already had 'an extensively realised democracy, rights and influence extended to the lowest orders of the people, which is being currently imitated abroad.'⁵⁷ Some, however, challenged this communal suffrage introduced under 'socialist dictatorship': as it was not possible to rely on the political maturity of the masses, the minimum voting age and tax limits should have been raised.⁵⁸ To all republicans, such suggestions revealed the anti-democratic attitudes behind the conservative rhetoric of democracy.

The leading governmental party continued to emphasise how the Russian Revolution had replaced democracy with 'a bloody class dictatorship' and to forecast that the German Social Democratic revolution would follow the path beaten by Russian or Finnish socialists in their quest for a 'boundless democracy'. Confronted by the ignorance of the masses and the general corruption of socialist leaders, this ambition would reject parliamentary means in favour of some form of Red dictatorship. In Finland, too, there

⁵⁷ *US*, 20 November 1918, 3; *US*, 18 December 1918, 3.

⁵⁸ *US*, 18 December 1918, 3.

were 'Bolshevist elements of the people who want to replace rule by the people with their own dictatorial rule,'⁵⁹ and this danger was used by the right to legitimate reactionary policies. As the socialists appeared to be violating 'democracy' with their rhetoric in the press, their newspapers should be closed. This conservative post-Civil War nervousness about alternative routes to democracy was a key feature of its fragility in Finland in autumn 1918. Only the abdication of Friedrich Karl in December and new elections in March 1919, demanded by the Entente, would force the conservatives to negotiate on a compromise - by calling for the limitations to majority parliamentarism implied by presidential powers.

5. Progressivist liberals advocate for democracy and national reconciliation

Many progressivist liberals, unlike conservatives, continued to defend the constitutional plans for a presidential republic of late 1917. Together with the Agrarians, they constituted the forces counteracting the fragility of Finnish democracy emerging on the revolutionary left during 1917 and spring 1918 and on the reactionary right in summer and autumn 1918. The centrist groups were opposed to monarchy, in favour of extending rule by the people and sought reconciliation after the Civil War through

⁵⁹ US, 17 November 1918, 5.

strengthening democracy and parliamentarism. A typical centrist argument was that democracy was justified by the Finnish national character and political culture, the Civil War fought to defend democracy and an unstoppable international trend towards democratisation. The Finns as a people could be trusted and educated politically. The centrists contrasted what they considered the perverted democracy of Bolshevism with the Nordic tradition of peasant democracy while rejecting monarchy as opposed to proper rule by the people.⁶⁰

For the parliamentary group and party convention of the Agrarian League, who referred to their programme as democratic and republican, any monarchical constitution undermined the idea of democracy.⁶¹ They wanted to defend the cause of democracy by parliamentary means, reject compromises on a monarchical constitution, and substitute royal election with a referendum on the constitution.⁶² Santeri Alkio, their chairman, viewed the monarchical project as a reaction to the Red rebellion that threatened to destroy rule by the people.⁶³

Helsingin Sanomat, the organ of the Young Finns, also advocated a democratic constitution even if not so consistently as the Agrarians. The paper accused the monarchists of having lost their

⁶⁰ Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 335–7, 410, 484–5.

⁶¹ *US*, 7 August 1918, 5; *US*, 27 September 1918, 3.

⁶² *Helsingin Sanomat (HS)*, 26 September 1918, 4.

⁶³ *US*, 8 August 1918, 7.

trust in the integrity of the masses and hence striving for a monarchy independent of the people. An autocratic order would be reinforced by further limitations on democratic parliamentary representation, by introducing a bicameral parliament or representation based on property and status. *Helsingin Sanomat* wanted to create a political system that relied on the people as a whole, allowing broad representation, and counted on the people's ability to make political progress. Foreign examples demonstrated the necessity of broad popular support for political order: German military strength against Britain was claimed to have arisen from the polity's internal unity and popular basis. In Finland, such unity could only be achieved with a republican and democratic constitution supported by the great majority, including the people at large in the parliamentary system and political education to make citizens supportive of the state. Such a constitution would facilitate the rise of a parliamentary labour movement as opposed to revolutionary social democracy and unify the nation.⁶⁴

In August, *Helsingin Sanomat* viewed the monarchical project as opposed to parliamentary democracy. Ultra-reactionary Swedish- and Finnish-speaking forces, motivated by arbitrary interpretations of the native constitutional tradition, seemed to be aiming at a monarchy and replacing 'our democratic social and political order' with a system of representation that would concentrate political power in the hands of an exclusive upper class. 'The current

⁶⁴ HS, 4 August 1918, 4.

campaign for monarchy is simultaneously a campaign against democracy and liberalism,' the paper concluded, calling on progressive forces to fight for rule by the people against its leftist and rightist subversions.⁶⁵ Liberal papers reinforced the interpretation that the project for a royal election reflected a 'crypto-reaction' against all forms of democracy. In this view, the socialist abuse of the concept in 1917 and their redefinition of democracy as popular anarchy had merely strengthened this inherently conservative reaction. While both extremes were to be rejected, the fear of Bolshevism nevertheless persuaded some liberals to become supporters of monarchy.⁶⁶

As the monarchical project proceeded, *Helsingin Sanomat* complained how 'a democratically inclined people' was excluded from the decision on a new constitution. National unity would be difficult to achieve if the people were not allowed to contribute through a referendum: '[t]he people do not easily demonstrate trust in such leaders who do not trust the people.'⁶⁷ An even worse legitimacy crisis would follow with an imported king.⁶⁸ Due to German dominance in Finland, this republican constitutional discourse lacked references to Western parliamentary democracies and built on German debates instead. *Helsingin Sanomat* cited Wolfgang

⁶⁵ HS, 11 August 1918, 6.

⁶⁶ HS, 15 August 1918, 5, citing *Tampereen Sanomat*.

⁶⁷ HS, 22 September 1918, 5.

⁶⁸ HS, 22 September 1918, 5.

Heine's article in the *Berliner Tageblatt* in favour of 'a decisive and irreversible step towards democracy, politics and government originating really from the people.'⁶⁹

Just before the royal election, *Helsingin Sanomat* suddenly expressed its willingness to compromise, referring to the monarchists' readiness to recognise the parliamentary responsibility of ministers and to limit the royal veto. Numerous conversions among Young Finn MPs arising from foreign political concerns – once the creation of a republic seemed impossible to achieve – explain this change of mind.⁷⁰ The party organ now conceded that 'democratic progress' might be possible under monarchy. The remaining shortcomings would be solved later on; the monarchists and republicans should just join forces to safeguard the international status of the country.⁷¹ Some liberals saw democracy and parliamentarism as vulnerable should the eighteenth-century Swedish constitution remain in force. Others continued to argue that 'a democratic Finland' would be a better ally for a democratising Germany as well.⁷² The liberals agreed on the vulnerability of Finnish democracy but disagreed on how to save it.

⁶⁹ HS, 22 September 1918, 11.

⁷⁰ Vares, *Varpuset*, 238–9.

⁷¹ HS, 8 October 1918, 4.

⁷² HS, 8 October 1918, 5, with contradictory letters to the editor by K. R. Rauhala and Santeri Ivalo.

Afterwards *Helsingin Sanomat* reported on 'democratic progress' in Germany and its positive reception on the Swedish left.⁷³ By the time of the German Revolution, the paper had however rejoined the republican opposition, challenging the election of Friedrich Karl as undemocratic and calling for new elections in the name of 'democracy and republic'.⁷⁴ It saw the post-war democratic wave as making democratisation unavoidable, in Finland as elsewhere. It believed that the sacrifices of the Civil War had made Finnish society strong enough to prevent further attempts at establishing dictatorial rule: the Finns could decide about democratic reforms on their own, without internal or external pressures, and unite their divided people. The constitutional question was to be reintroduced, since monarchy had lost credibility in the Central Powers, and new elections should be organised without delay.⁷⁵

Helsingin Sanomat was openly enthusiastic about an alliance with 'democratic Germany' after the German Revolution.⁷⁶ It sympathised with the new progressivist German Democratic Party, which advocated a republican and parliamentary order and was ready to cooperate with the majority Social Democrats against both the

⁷³ For instance, *HS*, 17 October 1918, 8, and *HS*, 18 October 1918, 8.

⁷⁴ *US*, 11 November 1918, 2.

⁷⁵ *HS*, 13 November 1918, 3.

⁷⁶ *HS*, 16 November 1918, 5.

reactionary right and revolutionary left.⁷⁷ This illustrates the dominance of the German model, also among liberals in Finland, where the British model was not idealised.

The new National Progress Party that emerged from a division in the Young Finns – interestingly soon after the fall of German monarchy – became the Finnish counterpart to the German Democratic Party.⁷⁸ *Helsingin Sanomat* took post-revolutionary developments in Germany as an indication of how democratisation led to the formation of new middle-class liberal parties ready to cooperate with lower classes to advance economic and social reforms aimed at strengthening society by providing equal opportunities to all.⁷⁹ The National Progress Party characterised itself as bourgeois but aimed at democratic progress, challenging what it saw as the reactionary loathing of democracy by the right.⁸⁰ Anglo-American liberal discourses began to find their way to Finland via this new party. Mikael Soininen (former professor of education, director of the body responsible for educational affairs, minister of ecclesiastical and educational affairs and a radical reformist interested in the American school system) declared the party to be progressivist and completely democratic, welcomed 'more democratic

⁷⁷ HS, 22 November 1918, 8; HS, 23 November 1918, 7; HS, 22 December 1918, 11.

⁷⁸ Vares, *Varpuset*, 241–2.

⁷⁹ HS, 29 November 1918, 3.

⁸⁰ HS, 23 November 1918, 2–3.

elements' and assured that it 'understands democracy differently from how the holders of rightist ideas apparently do.' In his view, the Finns had reached such a level of civic consciousness that they could only stabilise their political system by recognising the rights of the people and introducing an extensive reform programme. Popular education for democracy should be improved and the barriers between classes torn down to prevent further anti-democratic outbursts. Soininen's progressivist message was that 'everything has to be done not only for the people but also by the people.'⁸¹ *Helsingin Sanomat*, too, declared itself as a promoter of parliamentary democracy, international cooperation and reforms that would decrease class confrontations.⁸² The final democratisation of suffrage in Sweden in December⁸³ increased the confidence of Finnish liberal reformists. The Progressivists, together with the Agrarians, would play key roles in stabilising Finnish democracy after years of turmoil and reorienting the country from one-sidedly German to Anglo-American political models, including membership of the League of Nations.

6. The rise of revisionist social democracy

⁸¹ HS, 12 December 1918, 10.

⁸² HS, 1 December 1918, 3.

⁸³ HS, 2 December 1918, 3.

In November 1917, the radical socialist and ultimately revolutionary democracy agitated for by the Russian Bolsheviks and applied in parliamentary debates by Finnish SDP MPs had explicitly and repeatedly challenged democracy and parliamentarism in the 'Western' or 'bourgeois' senses. It monopolised the concept of 'the people' and questioned the legitimacy of the current parliament as an institution, calling to various degrees for rule by the proletariat and implying that a revolution and civil war had become inevitable.⁸⁴ By autumn 1918, after a lost civil war,

⁸⁴ Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 260–264, 266, 270–275, 279, 283, 286–287, 290. The evidence in parliamentary records from November–December 1917 is extensive and conclusive. Some contemporaries were convinced about the 'magic power' of words like 'bourgeois', 'proletariat' and 'revolution' as used in their radicalised meanings in the parliament, the press and in public meetings to provoke the crowds to violent rebellion: V. A. Koskenniemi, 'Sanojen taikamahti', *Uusi Päivä*, 3 May 1918, 3. There has nevertheless been a strong historiographical tradition of reconciliation – or intentional redescription – in Finland that denies the revolutionary character of pre-Civil War Finnish Social Democracy and turns to sociological explanations. Alapuro, *State and Revolution*, 167–169, argues that the leading Social Democrats did not aim at a revolution but only used revolutionary rhetoric to intimidate the bourgeoisie into agreeing to their political demands. See also R. Alapuro, 'Vallankumous', in: M. Hyvärinen et

few Finnish socialists continued to advocate such radical views in public. The SDP remained excluded from the parliament – with the exception of one MP – and the far left had no chance to express its views freely. The new moderate leaders tried to come to terms with the fragility of parliamentary democracy manifested by a dispute on a law on parliamentary sovereignty, the deterioration of parliamentary legitimacy, and an armed rebellion against parliamentary majority. While Otto Wille Kuusinen, the party leader of 1917, continued to aim at the dictatorship of the proletariat as a communist leader in Russia,⁸⁵ the new leaders were

al (eds.), *Käsitteet liikkeessä: Suomen poliittisen kulttuurin käsitehistoria*, Tampere 2003, 541; P. Haapala / M. Tikka, 'Vallankumous, sisällissota ja terrori Suomessa vuonna 1918', in: R. Gerwarth / J. Horne (eds.), *Sodasta rauhaan. Väkivallan vuodet Euroopassa 1918–1923*, Tampere 2013, 109, 111; Hentilä / Hentilä, *Saksalainen Suomi 1918*, 98. J. Matikainen, *Parlementarismiin kannattajasta vallankumouksen äänitorveksi. Suomen Sosialidemokraattisen Puolueen lehdistö 1917–1918*, Jyväskylä 2018, 11, sees any interpretation that suggests revolutionary intentions or agitation among Social Democrats as a 'myth' but nevertheless recognises ideological divisions within the labour press, including some revolutionary writing.

⁸⁵ Kuusinen, *Suomen vallankumouksesta*, 40–41.

redefining Social Democracy in revisionist terms⁸⁶ close to those of the German, Swedish and British sister parties. Although the party was weak, it hoped for a return to the parliament with considerable support after new elections.

The new organ *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti*, edited by Matti Paasivuori, the sole serving SDP MP, and Hannes Ryömä, another leading revisionist, started to appear on 12 September 1918. It is illustrative of continued struggle on definitions of democracy that the paper was published by a company called 'Democracy' (*Kansanvalta*). The paper turned down claims by the White victors - that the entire SDP had supported the Red rebellion - underscoring opposition to 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' in the party convention of November 1917. The decision by a parliamentary minority of Socialists to take over all governmental power had been 'clearly against Social Democracy, against all democracy and thus principally completely mistaken,' the paper insisted. The ambiguous compromise that had enabled such a takeover had initially been intended to calm down an anarchist minority within the party.⁸⁷ A few party leaders had nevertheless launched a revolt

⁸⁶ See especially K. H. Wiik, *Kovan kokemuksen opetuksia. Sananen Suomen työväelle*, Helsinki 1918, 3, 102, according to which the old party was no more.

⁸⁷ See J. Siltala, *Sisällissodan psykohistoria*, Helsinki 2009, on the radicalisation process.

without the party taking any legal decisions.⁸⁸ This was to concede that much of the fragility of Finnish democracy in 1917 had arisen from within the SDP. In that year, the Finnish bourgeoisie had been repeatedly accused of belonging to an international conspiracy to destroy democracy and the working class (which were synonymous terms in the radical discourse of 1917).

The rejection of the policies that had been adopted by the leaders of SDP during 1917 could not have been clearer. The ability of the party leadership to redefine the concept of democracy from rule by the proletariat to rule by parliamentary majority – possibly in cooperation with non-socialist democrats – was a major turning point in the construction of a sustainable polity. This rethinking is most visible in a series of columns published in September–October 1918 by Evert Huttunen, an MP in both parliaments of 1917 and a Russian-speaking participant in revolutionary assemblies in Petrograd who had contributed to revolutionary discourse in summer 1917 but been critical of revolutionary radicalisation before the Civil War, speaking within the party for parliamentary cooperation with reformist non-socialists instead of establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* (SD), 16 September 1918, 2; Ryömä, *Vallankumousvuoden tapahtumista*, 37.

⁸⁹ O. Rinta-Tassi, 'Kuusinen vallankumousvuosina', in: V. Salminen (ed.), *Nuori Otto Ville Kuusinen 1881-1920*, Jyväskylä 1970, 118; Matikainen, *Parlementarismin kannattajasta*, 150, 163, 192, 205.

In autumn 1918, Huttunen lamented the way in which 'anarcho-socialist elements in our party tied their fate with the fate of the Russian Bolshevik movement, striking a hard blow to the democracy of our country.'⁹⁰ This contemporary interpretation differs from emphasis in some Finnish historical research on a distinction between the Finnish party and the Russian Bolsheviks, arising from the separate histories of the parties and the narrative of the Finnish Social Democrats as consistent Kautskyists who found themselves in a revolution against their will.⁹¹ It rather lends support to a comparative and transnational analysis of the dynamics of political debate in 1917, emphasising discursive transfers from Russia to Finland that accelerated the clash of alternative discourses on democracy and a clearer

⁹⁰ SD, 21 October 1918, 2. K. H. Wiik, too, admitted Bolshevik influence on some revolutionaries but questioned whether it was the only reason for the Red rising: Wiik, *Kovan kokemukseen opetuksia*, 81–83.

⁹¹ P. Kettunen, *Poliittinen liike ja sosiaalinen kollektiivisuus. Tutkimus sosialidemokriasta ja ammattiyhdistysliikkeestä Suomessa 1918–1930*, Helsinki 1986, 87–88; O. Rinta-Tassi, *Kansanvaltuuskunta punaisen Suomen hallituksena*, Helsinki 1986, 39, 41; Alapuro, *State and Revolution*, 162–170, 190–194; R. Alapuro, 'Vallankumouskausi 1917–1918 vertailevalta kannalta', in: J. Hannikainen / M. Hyrkkänen / O. Vehviläinen (eds.), *Väki voimakas*, vol. 4: *Suomi 1917–1918*, Tampere 1990, 20.

division of the Finnish left only as a consequence of the Civil War.⁹² The Finnish food crisis was not exceptional but discourse on it was.⁹³ The same could be said about social differences in general.

Huttunen emphasised the role of the Zimmerwald International – which the SDP had joined after advice from Alexandra Kollontai in June 1917 without many being familiar with its programme – in the radicalisation of the already revolutionary Finnish Social Democratic discourse. Unlike in Sweden and Germany, the SDP had not been divided into supporters of parliamentary and revolutionary methods; the united party had aimed to push through reforms with its parliamentary majority.⁹⁴ Marxist discourse had radicalised in the course of 1917 towards uncompromising class struggle,⁹⁵ rejecting cooperation with 'even the radical and even the most democratic bourgeois parties,' denouncing parliamentarism, armed extra-parliamentary struggle,⁹⁶ and ultimately leading to civil war. The decisive factors influencing the masses in this process were the party organ *Työmies*, the bodies of the party and particularly the radicalised labour association of Helsinki – that is, not necessarily mass

⁹² Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*.

⁹³ Also Ryömä, *Vallankumousvuoden tapahtumista*, 55.

⁹⁴ SD, 21 October 1918, 2.

⁹⁵ Also Wiik, *Kovan kokemuksen opetuksia*, 9.

⁹⁶ See also Wiik, *Kovan kokemuksen opetuksia*, 44, 48.

radicalisation forcing the party to revolution, as the mainstream historiographical narrative goes. *Työmies* encouraged radicalisation with its exaggerated descriptions of class contrasts in Finnish society⁹⁷ and violent agitation against the bourgeoisie; its press discourse had accelerated the polarisation of public opinion rather than calming down confrontations.⁹⁸ According to Huttunen, the Helsinki association had campaigned by questionable means for the convening of the dissolved first parliament of 1917, challenging the national parliament.⁹⁹ Alternative views of regional labour papers¹⁰⁰ had been effectively suppressed by the 'Marxists' of Helsinki with accusations of

⁹⁷ On Finnish class society, see Haapala, 'The Expected and Non-Expected Roots of Chaos'.

⁹⁸ See also Ryömä, *Vallankumousvuoden tapahtumista*, 18-19, 26, 35, 39-41, 59, 68 on the 'half-falsity' of the labour press and 55 on the limits of its influence, as well as Siltala, *Sisällissodan psykohistoria*, 524. An interesting comparative case is the Swedish Social Democrats led by Hjalmar Branting trying to calm down excitement among the masses in spring 1917: Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 143.

⁹⁹ See Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 176, on the Helsinki labour 'parliament' as an explicit challenge.

¹⁰⁰ Matikainen, *Parlementarismin kannattajasta*, 10, points at the diversity of views in the labour press during 1917.

'revisionism'.¹⁰¹ Parliamentary group leaders had forced the dissidents onto their side while pushing the intelligentsia out of the party. Huttunen had seen how the functioning of the group was directed to unknown dangerous paths and how the group increasingly, without a will of its own, slid into such procedures that led to a parliamentary crisis and thereby advanced the anarcho-socialist movement to the dictatorship of the workers.¹⁰²

Huttunen was redefining Finnish Social Democracy by writing the history of a crisis in parliamentary legitimacy which led to the current fragility of Finnish democracy – alongside uncompromising bourgeois reactions to socialist demands. There was no denying the failure of the SDP in the construction of Western parliamentary democracy:

Despite its majority status, last year the group often acted in a way that would have been a scandal in Western parliamentary

¹⁰¹ Also Wiik, *Kovan kokemuksen opetuksia*, 10.

¹⁰² *SD*, 20 September 1918, 2-3; *SD*, 21 October 1918, 2. The decisive role of the party leaders and the Helsinki association in rejecting parliamentary methods and the rebellion against 'a democratic parliament' was also emphasised by Juho Kujala, another former SDP MP: *HS*, 19 September 1918, 5.

circumstances – no matter how sad and painful it is to say this about one's own parliamentary group.¹⁰³ |

The group had pushed through a bill on parliamentary sovereignty arrogantly with no respect for other parties. As the parliament had been dissolved and new elections were approaching, party leaders Otto Wille Kuusinen, Kullervo Manner and Matti Turkia had convened the old parliament without the other parties, declared the elections to be 'revolutionary' and campaigned with demands for a national constituent assembly¹⁰⁴ – all actions leading unavoidably to revolutionary solutions and violence. Bills under discussion in the national parliament had been taken to simultaneous party conventions, decisions forced through that made parliamentary compromises impossible and compelled remaining moderates to give in, and demonstrations organised with the support of undisciplined Russian soldiers to put pressure on the

¹⁰³ SD, 21 September 1918, 2; also Ryömä, *Vallankumousvuoden tapahtumista*, 42.

¹⁰⁴ The events are summarised in Soikkanen, *Kohti kansan valtaa*, 236, and E. Ketola, *Kansalliseen kansanvaltaan. Suomen itsenäisyys, sosialidemokraatit ja Venäjän vallankumous 1917*, Helsinki 1987, 333–334, 340.

parliament to pass legislation.¹⁰⁵ Party leaders resorted to such extra-parliamentary methods in the mistaken belief that

... the masses were to be deceived and to be agitated to undertake revolutionary action in the unhappy fallacy that the masses would not proceed beyond words and threats and that more would be thereby 'extorted' from the bourgeoisie than it would otherwise perhaps be possible.¹⁰⁶

This was to say that the Social Democratic leaders had failed to understand the connection between their violent revolutionary rhetoric, prevalent ways of thinking among party supporters, reactions on the non-socialist side and readiness for violent action - the connections between ways of talking, thinking and taking physical action. Huttunen concluded that the reform demands of early November 1917 had been revolutionary, partly entailed (an unintentional) declaration of 'civil war'¹⁰⁷ and were based on revolutionary enthusiasm and trust in external help from Russia.¹⁰⁸ Hannes Ryömä added that the revolution was intended to introduce

¹⁰⁵ Siltala, *Sisällissodan psykohistoria*, 525-7; S. Nyström, *Helsinki 1914-1918. Toivon, pelon ja sekasorron vuodet*, Helsinki 2013, 220; Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 176-7.

¹⁰⁶ SD, 21 September 1918, 2.

¹⁰⁷ For references to a 'civil war' in parliamentary discourse at that time, see Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 212, 261, 263, 269, 271.

¹⁰⁸ SD, 25 September 1918, 2.

Bolshevism into Finland and to export it to Western Europe.¹⁰⁹ The Finnish party leaders had prioritised revolutionary over parliamentary action to such an extent that the law on parliamentary sovereignty as a 'symbol of rule by the people' had not been passed in November 1917; thus bourgeois opposition was not the only reason for this.¹¹⁰ Contemporary accounts of Social Democratic leaders intentionally¹¹¹ constructing a 'parliamentary crisis' through discursive radicalisation in the press and parliament and violating parliamentary rules cannot be explained away as mere turncoat action arising from post-Civil War circumstances. They deserve more attention in interpretations of developments that led to the Finnish Civil War, particularly as they correspond with an analysis of the discursive dynamics of parliamentary debates on the constitution in Finland during 1917.¹¹²

These accounts suggest diversity of Finnish socialist views in 1917 but also a major shift in party policy in autumn 1918. At this point, *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* connected Finnish Social Democracy to Western revisionist discourses by printing an article

¹⁰⁹ Ryömä, *Vallankumousvuoden tapahtumista*, 48.

¹¹⁰ SD, 26 September 1918, 2. On 'unparliamentary' methods of the Social Democratic parliamentary group, see also Ryömä, *Vallankumousvuoden tapahtumista*, 33, 59.

¹¹¹ See especially SD, 21 October 1918, 2.

¹¹² Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 532.

by Per Albin Hansson, a leading Swedish Social Democrat, on the election manifesto of the British Labour Party.¹¹³ The paper emphasised how both the theories and practices of Social Democracy had been adopted from Germany,¹¹⁴ which was true even though no comparable radicalisation had been seen there. This also became the mainstream interpretation in historiography on Social Democracy which played down the revolutionary impact in 1917. The emerging political system of Russian Bolshevism was condemned in *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* as being against 'social democracy' (*yhteiskunnallinen kansanvalta* in vernacular), by an imprisoned former editor and MP, Anton Huotari. Huotari had opposed the revolutionary measures of the party leadership before the Civil War, observed Bolshevism close up and concluded that it hated democracy based on universal suffrage and led to a dictatorship of a minority and endless civil war.¹¹⁵ Especially after the Civil War, there was a willingness to emphasise the point that the peculiar circumstances of Russia had led to the rise of anarchical socialism, which was irreconcilable with Finnish political culture.¹¹⁶ Bolshevism had simply been a temporary import from Russia that had nothing to do with Finnish socialism – an

¹¹³ SD, 23 September 1918, 4.

¹¹⁴ SD, 17 December 1918, 2.

¹¹⁵ SD, 16 October 1918, 2; Rinta-Tassi, 'Kuusinen vallankumousvuosina', 118.

¹¹⁶ SD, 5 December 1918, 2; SD, 6 December 1918, 2.

interpretation to be found in Finnish historical research as well.¹¹⁷ Yet the parliamentary debates and editorials of *Työmies* during 1917 and the reviewed accounts from autumn 1918 illustrate the potential extent and consequences of such an import in the revolutionary circumstances of 1917.

Besides managing the past and consciously reorienting political models, *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* participated in the constitutional strife from outside the parliament, its argumentation now leading it to favour Western parliamentary democracy. It counted on 'bourgeois democrats' (an unthinkable concept in the exclusive Social Democratic language of 1917¹¹⁸) to defend 'democratic', 'Western' and 'parliamentary' policies against the monarchists and envisaged future cooperation with the Agrarians and liberals in defence of democracy¹¹⁹ against 'the enemies of democracy' on the right.¹²⁰ The paper contrasted

¹¹⁷ Soikkanen, *Kohti kansan valtaa*, 148, 152, 164–8, 191, 215–216; A. Kujala, *Vallankumous ja kansallinen itsemääräämisoikeus*.

Venäjän sosialistiset puolueet ja suomalainen radikalismi vuosisadan alussa, Helsinki 1989, 316–317; J. Heikkilä, *Kansallista luokkapoliittikaa. Sosiaalidemokraatit ja Suomen autonomian puolustus 1905–1917*, Helsinki 1993, 386–387.

¹¹⁸ Ihäläinen, *Springs of Democracy*, 198, 200, 510, 517.

¹¹⁹ *SD*, 25 September 1918, 3; *SD*, 7 October 1918, 1; *SD*, 8 October 1918, 1; also *SD*, 9 October 1918, 3.

¹²⁰ *SD*, 5 October 1918, 4; also *SD*, 8 October 1918, 1.

emerging German democracy with Finnish monarchy and dared to be openly pro-Entente, writing about 'influential Western democratic circles' who would not accept the monarchist project.¹²¹ Such appeals to 'international democracy' were condemned by monarchist papers.¹²² The Social Democratic organ nevertheless went on to declare that monarchy was doomed to fail in Finland where democracy had recently been so strong and at a time when 'progress all over the world is going fast towards democracy.'¹²³ Reactionary policies of allying with the German and Swedish right in 'a battle against democracy in general' were bound to fail as Germany was likely to lose the war and the Prussian order to fall.¹²⁴ The Finnish right should learn from Germany and guarantee 'democratic circumstances' to workers too.¹²⁵ This meant holding new elections that would put to an end attempts to introduce 'an undemocratic constitution', limiting universal suffrage, cutting civil rights and cancelling reforms. Current 'fake parliamentarism' and austerity towards the defeated Reds should no longer be allowed to tarnish the reputation of Finland abroad.¹²⁶

¹²¹ SD, 9 October 1918, 2.

¹²² SD, 11 October 1918, 2.

¹²³ SD, 16 October 1918, 2.

¹²⁴ SD, 17 October 1918, 1.

¹²⁵ SD, 12 October 1918, 1.

¹²⁶ SD, 15 October 1918, 2; SD, 18 October 1918, 1; SD, 21 October 1918, 1; SD, 21 December 1918, 3.

At the advent of the German Revolution, the paper declared 'Down with our current reactionary right; instead reformist rule by the people!'¹²⁷ In line with contemporary Swedish reformist discourse¹²⁸ it wrote about 'a European political revolution' leading to democracy and a 'world revolution' that would come to the rescue of Finnish democracy. This did not mean the adoption of revolutionary policies, however, as Bolshevism would only end with bloodshed and 'world reaction'; parliamentarism alone was presented as the way forward.¹²⁹ It is symptomatic of the fragility of Finnish democracy that such writings on reformist parliamentary democracy led to the closure of *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* by the authorities.¹³⁰ Probably all commentary on the German Revolution appeared too sensitive in the circumstances of November 1918 when the prerequisites for Finnish monarchy were rapidly deteriorating. Once the paper was allowed to appear again, it lamented the fate of Finnish workers under 'a rightist dictatorial reign' at a time when 'the rest of the world is moving towards major democratic reforms.'¹³¹ After local elections, in which the SDP won major

¹²⁷ *SD*, 2 November 1918, 2.

¹²⁸ Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 373–381.

¹²⁹ *SD*, 6 November 1918, 2; *SD*, 7 November 1918, 2.

¹³⁰ News about it was published in *SD*, 11 November 1918, 4.

¹³¹ *SD*, 4 December 1918, 2. *Helsingin Sanomat* had denounced the closure of the paper as irreconcilable with the international trends of democracy though also expressed the criticism that the

victories, *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* went on complaining about measures against freedom of association and printing and attempts to 'suppress all rule by the people from this unfortunate country.' The Swedish-speaking bourgeoisie in particular was singled out as being willing to cancel all democratic reforms. At the same time, the international progress of democracy and the results of the local elections that strengthened Social Democracy at the cost of both bourgeois and communist anti-democrats provided grounds for hope.¹³²

The ideological goal of Social Democracy was defined as the establishment of socialism through majority democracy,¹³³ in line with Karl Kautsky who did not deny the possibility of democracy existing without socialism.¹³⁴ Cooperation between 'all honest, democratic citizens' was to be prioritised,¹³⁵ which was again an invitation to the bourgeois left to cooperate. The paper hoped that post-war Europe would take 'a reformist, democratic direction' so that Finnish Social Democrats would be able to cooperate with others to realise 'a democratic political revolution' similar to Denmark, France, Sweden and Germany -

SD had contributed to confrontations instead of simply defending parliamentary means: *HS*, 13 November 1918, 3.

¹³² *SD*, 19 December 1918, 2; *SD*, 21 December 1918, 3.

¹³³ *SD*, 5 December 1918, 2.

¹³⁴ *SD*, 29 December 1918, 3-4.

¹³⁵ *SD*, 17 October 1918, 1.

i.e. a revolution very different from the one that had taken place in Russia. Its conclusion was that the Civil War would have been avoided and major reforms achieved had the Social Democratic parliamentary group been willing to cooperate with other democratic forces in 1917.¹³⁶ The party's attitude to 'Western' parliamentary democracy had been completely redefined by the end of 1918, and the future of such a democracy depended on the readiness of the centre to respond to these calls for cooperation and the right to recognise the changes.

7. The fragile Finnish transition to democracy in international comparison

Whereas before and during the Civil War Finnish democracy faced challenges from inside the polity predominantly by the revolutionary Social Democrats, by autumn 1918, the fragility of the system was primarily due to the depth and uncompromising nature of the conservative reaction. The monarchists redescribed the established order opportunistically as 'democracy', questioned the relevance of any international democratic trends, and were ready to reverse steps towards parliamentary democracy. Their ideological allies could be found on the Prussian and Swedish right, and they reconsidered their stance only when both the Prussian monarchy and Swedish upper-house opposition to universal

¹³⁶ SD, 1 October 1918, 1; SD, 21 October 1918, 2-3.

suffrage had fallen and the Western powers had made it clear that Finnish independence would not be recognised without a move towards parliamentary democracy.

The liberal republicans and Agrarians, inspired by German and Swedish left-liberalism, defended longer-term democratic trends within Finnish society, advocating extended popular participation in politics as 'rule by the people' and calling for reforms that would help to reunite the divided population. Their opposition to monarchism kept the notion of parliamentary democracy alive and their readiness to negotiate and cooperate with a redefined Social Democracy would later strengthen its sustainability. Strong support for the National Progress Party and the Agrarian League in the elections of spring 1919 established Finnish democracy. Both parties, not unlike the Social Democrats, saw democracy as a dynamic means of developing society and actively looked for compromises between the political extremes.

The new leaders of the SDP, deeply shocked by the consequences of radicalism in 1917, completely redefined the party's relationship to Western parliamentary democracy by autumn 1918. They broke with Bolshevism, approached Western revisionism, and dominated Social Democratic discourse in the parliament and the press in 1919 during the search for compromise on a republican constitution.¹³⁷ This did not remove Marxist elements from the party, but the

¹³⁷ Ihalainen, *Springs of Democracy*, 474, 481, 483.

mainstream would remain strongly supportive of parliamentary democracy.

Both democratic and anti-democratic ideas found inspiration from outside – to the extent that the history of Finnish democracy should be seen as transnational and Finland as a nexus of competing discourses on democracy. None of the far-left or far-right authoritarian visions of democracy won in the aftermath of World War I, the far-left ones being effectively marginalised as a consequence of the Civil War. Rightist visions of an authoritarian monarchy were crushed, too, by the victory of the Entente and the political fermentation that followed in Germany, leading to the fall of the Prussian monarchy, and in Sweden, producing suffrage reform. Centrist defences of democracy remained consistent – with the notable exception of the liberal panic of early October 1918 – and the redefinition of Social Democracy left the conservatives with a decisive role in determining the future sustainability of democracy. This sustainability was linked to some extent to the centrality of the contested concept of democracy in political discourse for every political group. Even groups with authoritarian political goals had introduced ‘democracy’ or ‘rule by the people’ into their vocabulary, aiming to take over the common discourse on democracy if not downright imposing their interpretation.¹³⁸ The semantic similarity of ‘the people’ and

¹³⁸ On the general use but contestability of democracy in Europe, also after World War II, see M. Conway / V. Depkat, ‘Towards a

'nation' in Finnish, connected in the vernacular term for democracy (*kansanvalta*), also ensured this sustainability.

By 1919, after the fall of the far-left and monarchical versions of 'democracy', political power in Finland was in the hands of politicians who rejected both revolutionary Bolshevism and reactionary bureaucratic rightist policies. These centrist and bourgeois republicans saw themselves as representatives of victorious progressive and liberal forces capable of realising rule by the people, unlike the equally dangerous forces of the two extremes. Under their leadership and cooperation with moderates from both left and right, several social reforms aiming to integrate a people divided by civil war were introduced and radical forces counteracted.¹³⁹ A presidential republic with parliamentary democracy and division of powers was adopted as a compromise once competing alternatives had failed at home and lost ground internationally. Despite unhappiness with the compromise, there emerged a general willingness to maintain it in order to

European History of the Discourse of Democracy: Discussing Democracy in Western Europe, 1945–60', in: M. Conway / K. K. Patel (eds.), *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century: Historical Approaches*, Basingstoke 2010, 132–156, esp. 132–133.

¹³⁹ V. Vares, *Itsenäisyys ja poliittisen mentaliteetin muutos: konservatiivisesta elitismistä massa- ja luokkapohjaiseen demokratiaan (1919–1933)*, Turku 1991, 15, 17; Rainio-Niemi, 'Die finnische Demokratie', 405–408, 415.

avoid repeating the crises of 1917/18. Finnish membership in the League of Nations became one of the first projects in which the winners of the Civil War and the revisionist majority of the Social Democrats were on the same side, strengthening Finnish democracy by integrating it with the Western international community.¹⁴⁰

In the interwar era, Finnish democracy remained unstable in comparison with other Nordic democracies, encountering both far-left and far-right pressures. Once the centrist republicans and the Social Democrats had declared their support for parliamentary democracy, the ability of the Finnish-speaking conservatives to recover their trust in the masses and to join the constitutional compromise became a major factor in making Finnish democracy less fragile. The right was far from being fully ready to rethink compromise and reform, however. Its influence on various societal institutions continued to be more extensive than its seats in parliament would imply, and it supported the strict control of leftist activities.¹⁴¹ After 1919, communism continued to challenge democracy, but consistent opposition to communism from the other

¹⁴⁰ P. Ihalainen, 'Internationalization and Democratization Interconnected: The Swedish and Finnish Parliaments Debating Membership in the League of Nations', in: *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 39 (2019) 1, 11-31.

¹⁴¹ Vares, *Itsenäisyys*, 16, 18; Rainio-Niemi, 'Die finnische Demokratie', 408.

parties¹⁴² – reinforced with popular and labour education – strengthened the sustainability of Finnish democracy. Long-term factors such as constitutional continuity from early modern times, widespread support for law and order, efficient administration and traditions of local self-government increased the legitimacy of the political system. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Civil Guards and the Lapua Movement still constituted a major challenge from the far right, but the centre and mainstream conservatives rejected these illegal methods while acting by legal means to counter communism. Most of the right emphasised legalism – including President P. E. Svinhufvud who had been the regent in 1918¹⁴³ – perhaps recalling their failed alliance with Prussianism 15 years earlier. From the 1930s onwards, Finland was included in the emerging concept of 'Nordic democracy', which was also shared increasingly by conservatives concerned about the rise of the far right in Germany.¹⁴⁴

The far left continued to entertain its own concept of democracy at least into the 1970s. The contested nature of democracy has

¹⁴² Rainio-Niemi, 'Die finnische Demokratie', 407, 413.

¹⁴³ J. Kurunmäki, "'Nordic Democracy' in 1935: On the Finnish and Swedish Rhetoric of Democracy", in: J. Kurunmäki / J. Strang (eds.), *Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy*, Helsinki 2010, 40; Rainio-Niemi, 'Die finnische Demokratie', 410-416.

¹⁴⁴ J. Kurunmäki / J. Strang, *Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy*, Helsinki 2010, 10, 24, 32; Kurunmäki, 'Nordic Democracy', 76.

remained evident in Finland, with 'White' and 'Red' understandings and narratives of the Civil War surfacing at times, for instance in connection with its centennial. Yet, there has also been a consistent joint endeavour to avoid reproducing the confrontations of the Civil War and to aim for compromise.¹⁴⁵ The fragility of the era around 1917/18 has been successfully converted into a source of sustainability for Finnish democracy as a version of Scandinavian democracy. Due to its geopolitical location, democracy in Finland has always been challenged more explicitly than in the other Nordic countries, which has mainly reinforced its Scandinavian characteristics.

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¹⁴⁵ See the joint declaration by the chairs of the parliamentary parties in commemoration of the Civil War on 26 January 2018, <https://muistovuosi.fi/vuosi-1918-muistuttaa-eheyden-ja-sovinnon-merkityksesta/> (accessed 10 March 2018), with a strong emphasis on 'Finnish democracy' accepting differing views and solving disagreements through deliberation.